

**PRAY LIKE A MYSTIC**  
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**Homily # 1, from I Kings 19**  
**June 20, 2010**

“Now there was a great wind, but God was not in the wind. And after the wind, an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, a fire, but God was not in the fire. And after the fire, sheer silence. And when Elijah heard it, he covered his face, for God was in the sound of silence.”

The world of our lives is so...so noisy – isn't it? Most days, virtually every waking moment is filled with sound: talking, cell phones, ipods, muzak, cd, traffic, television. People often tell me that they've not heard the voice of God. But can God get a word in edgewise, midst all the noise?

Even in church we are tempted to fill every minute with sound, lest someone complain that worship is boring. Ever been to a Quaker meeting or a monastery? The key element in worship is what? – silence, periods of sheer silence.

What do Quakers and monastics know about silence? The 14<sup>th</sup> century mystic, Meister Eckhart, said, “Nothing in all creation is so like God as silence.”

But we are so used to sound all around us, that when the sound disappears we find ourselves at a loss. I hear it about our silent prayer time:

“Greg, how long do you let the silence last?”

“Oh, 30 seconds or so.”

“Wow, it seems longer. I never know what to do with that silent time.”

Maybe, we shouldn't call it, “Silent Prayers.” Instead, what if we called it, “Listening Time”? Time not to pray for anything, but time to learn to listen for God's movement deep in our lives.

“But what goes through my mind during the silence doesn't feel very Godlike,” people tell me.

Yes, it's hard to focus our minds when silence creates un-noisy space. For silence as meditation or contemplation is a spiritual discipline that takes practice. But the promise of scripture and of the great spiritual teachers is that in learned and practiced stillness, the mystical Presence of God can be discerned....

So, let's practice. Get as comfortable as you can in a church pew. Close your eyes or focus on the altar candles, the flowers, or the cross. Let your hands rest in your lap, palms up and open in a gesture of spiritual surrender. And we won't worry about the rustling around of the children, or if a baby cries, or someone coughs. For this shared communal silence is not a retreat from our humanity, but a going deeper into all that makes us human.

In this spirit of contemplation, be mindful of your breathing. In Hebrew, the word for breath, “ruah,” is the same word as “spirit.” So to take a deep breath is to in-spirit yourself. To inhale is to take in God's life-forming Spirit. To exhale is to breathe God's Sacredness into the world.

So just breathe deeply the miracle of your life, which is your life in God. Let it be a form of prayer – “breath prayer,” the mystics call it.... (Silence)

As other not very spiritual thoughts intrude, that's okay. For maybe God is in the midst of it all. Maybe the thought, the discomfort, the recollection or fast forward in your head is ingredient for the spiritual mixing bowl God is using for some greater purpose.

But you'll not know unless you are still enough, silent enough, long enough.... (Silence)

Another spiritual master, Isaac of Nineveh said, "If you love the truth, be a lover of silence. For silence brings you fruit that words cannot describe."

So in silence, sit with this question: How is God at work in your life lately? (Silence)

For God was not in the wind. And God was not in the earthquake. Nor was God in the fire.

But after the fire...silence. And God was in the sound of silence.... (Silence)

### **THE SOUND OF SILENCE** **Homily #2, June 20 2010**

"And after the wind, and the earthquake, and the fire...silence. And when Elijah heard it, he covered his face. For God was in the sound of silence."

The spiritual masters of all the world's great religions teach the importance of practiced silence. They call it, "resting in the sacred."

In the beautifully simple words of Psalm 46: "Be still and know that God is."

But that's hard for us who are taught and trained to be doers. We've learned – haven't we – that our worth as persons depends on work and achievement. When we meet someone new we ask, "What do you do?"

But where do we learn just to be spiritually receptive, to be quiet and available in the presence of God, letting God be God?

Carl Jung, the great Swiss psychologist, said, "If you can't stand to be alone with yourself in silence, why do you inflict yourself on us?"

And Jung is so right. How much of the hurt and hatred and violence in the world reflects deep inner turmoil within persons? We lash out at others when we don't understand what's going on inside ourselves. We try to control others when we feel out of control ourselves. We insist on having the last word when deep down we're not sure we even know ourselves.

And how much of the political anger and the current cultural narcissism of "gimme-gimme" that's tearing apart our social fabric...how much of all the noise is really about people losing touch with their own souls? And the way to the soul is the way of silent contemplation.

Oh, not that you or I should go mute. But maybe it's time to rediscover what Elijah rediscovered: that the still silent moment draws us back into the Sacred Presence around and within ourselves.

So what would it be like if you began each new day with even two minutes of intentional, practiced silence, in which after brushing your teeth you just rested in God?

And what if on the way to wherever you need to be, you turned off the car radio and just prayed, “God, what do you need from me today?” And then you listened.

Or what if in the midst of a frantic, adrenaline charged day, you just stopped doing and for one minute silently breathed in and out the words, “Be still and know that God is”?

And what if, your last words in the evening were a simple prayer? - “O God, I now surrender my day and my life unto you,” followed by two minutes of listening to the sound of silence.

And what if in this world that makes our ears hurt and our heads ache from all the noise...what if in this church we extended our worship silent time from 30 seconds to a whole minute?

For there was a great wind, but God was not in the wind. And then the mountain shook, but God was not in the earthquake. And there was fire on the mountain, but God was not in the fire. And after the fire...silence. And God was in the sound of silence....

(Silence)